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# Local memories: Conflict and lived experience in the Spanish Civil War

## ABSTRACT

1. *The winners of any conflict often try to impose their views on the defeated. Through*
2. *official and unofficial mechanisms, most of which operate under the aegis of the*
3. *state and other agents that work on its behalf, the voices of the defeated are silenced.*
4. *One important counter-mechanism that is available, the one that may serve to resist*
5. *the imposition of the victors' History, is frequently found in the collection, analysis*
6. *and publication of oral testimonies, which give expression to, and magnify, silenced*
7. *and oppressed memories. Orality therefore provides us with a window into past*
8. *events or, rather, with multiple windows that allow us to see and take account of*
9. *the myriad histories of which the past is actually composed, according not to the*
10. *state-imposed version, but to the ways in which people remember it. Through an*
11. *ethnographic study of local memories in one southern Spanish village, this article*
12. *examines some of the ways in which the Spanish Civil War is remembered, focusing*
13. *particularly on the lived experience of hunger and repression, and the memories of*
14. *ideological clashes, class struggles and conflicts over land ownership.*
- 15.
- 16.
- 17.
- 18.
- 19.

## KEYWORDS

memory  
Spanish Civil War  
local memories  
orality  
community  
ethnography

## INTRODUCTION

It is unbelievable, what a war does in a village. Such a tight-knit community, and you see [...] People in the village that you see every day, you see them in the street and you know they killed your father, and have done other things too. Those things remain inside you. That thorn is still there [...] People may not talk about it, but they know it, they still remember.

(Carlos 2014, my translation)

Memory is, by its very nature, a site of struggle and, in the specific national context of Spain, is clearly one that continues to provoke a great deal of anger and argument. The perpetual erasure of the memory of the defeated did not end with Franco's death in 1975, but was sustained during the democratic period. Not only have Francoist myths continued to be promoted through sociocultural channels, long after the end of the dictatorship, but oblivion itself became institutionalized, from the early days of the new post-dictatorial system, to the 1977 Amnesty Act (which guaranteed that the agents of repression were protected). The Act was the legal expression of the pact of silence agreed during the Transition: it committed all sides in the conflict to forgive and forget, but served, in effect, to exonerate Franco's high-ranking officials and civil servants from any crimes they had committed. Consequently, in Spain, the concepts of 'amnesty' and 'amnesia' have frequently been conflated as synonyms (Escudero et al. 2013: 9). The 1977 Act, which is still in force today, has limited the scope of the 2007 Law of Historical Memory. Passed by PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, technically a centre-left party), the Law provides guidelines on issues related to memory, from the exhumation of mass graves to the elimination of street names that still refer to agents of the dictatorship. However, the fact that there is no obligation to enforce it (it provides, instead, the opportunity for localized debates) has led to further political polarization, particularly since the right-wing government of Partido Popular have stopped applying it.

All in all, the exercise of memory has become a contemporary re-enactment of the old divisions that are very much part of the country's identity, and which still permeate social, political and cultural life in contemporary Spain. It was only approximately 30 years after Franco's death that the recovery of memory began to be promoted, through social, political and cultural means, by Memory Associations, composed of victims and relatives, together with scholars and public figures who champion the victims' universal human right to obtain truth, justice and reparation. Only then did some of the unheard voices of the past begin to gain attention, although their stories continue to remain, on the whole, obscured by (still predominant) state-sponsored versions of history.

Against this backdrop, I examine some of the narratives that these politics of memory and oblivion have disregarded. The interdisciplinary framework of Critical Ethnography of Memory (Sanz Sabido forthcoming) aims to gain access to 'local' memories – that is, individual memories of local events that happened in small communities – through a process of immersion in those localities where specific incidents occurred. Although there is no space in this article to discuss the methodological underpinning of the approach in all its depth, it is worth pointing out that Critical Ethnography of Memory depends on a critical analysis of the narration *and* performance of oral testimonies about

1. past events (Sanz Sabido forthcoming). The purpose is to create a counter-  
 2. mechanism that gives voice to those who have been silenced (Portelli 2006),  
 3. in the first instance by the imposition of repressive political, legal, economic  
 4. and cultural mechanisms during the war and the dictatorship and later, after  
 5. Franco's death, through ostensibly democratized channels of control. The  
 6. Critical Ethnography of Memory can therefore be understood as a tool that can  
 7. be used to uncover what Foucault (2004) described as 'subjugated knowledges',  
 8. which he defined in two different ways: as 'historical contents that have been  
 9. buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations', or as

10.  
 11. whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconcept-  
 12. tual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowl-  
 13. edges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below  
 14. the required level of erudition or scientificity. And it is thanks to the  
 15. reappearance of these knowledges from below, of these unqualified or  
 16. even disqualified knowledges [...] that made the critique possible.

(Foucault 2004: 7–8)

17.  
 18.  
 19. Certain types of knowledge are therefore hidden, while others are declared  
 20. ineligible before they have even acquired the status of knowledge. For  
 21. Foucault, these knowledges consist of what people know at a local level:

22.  
 23. this is by no means the same thing as common knowledge or common  
 24. sense but, on the contrary, a particular knowledge, a knowledge that is  
 25. local, regional, or differential, incapable of unanimity and which derives  
 26. its power solely from the fact that it is different from all the knowledges  
 27. that surround it.

(Foucault 2004: 7)

28.  
 29.  
 30. Following a similar principle, the primary concern of a Critical Ethnography  
 31. of Memory involves immersion in local milieus and the critical analysis of oral  
 32. testimonies (an approach that is closer to the second definition given above),  
 33. although it also takes into account the first perspective, since they are both  
 34. useful in facilitating critique: they are both oriented, in other words, towards  
 35. unearthing hidden stories, on behalf of the people who experienced them,  
 36. and validating them against the systemic, long-standing marginalization of  
 37. their voices. To put it differently, this method contrasts local events and expe-  
 38. riences, as remembered by those who lived them, with those national memo-  
 39. ries nurtured by official state channels. In this respect, oral testimonies play  
 40. a crucial role since, in Fraser's words, they help to 'articulate the experiences  
 41. of people who, historically speaking, would otherwise remain inarticulate'  
 42. (Fraser 1979: 31; see also Burke 1993; Le Goff 1991).

43. This article examines some of the ways in which the Spanish Civil War  
 44. is remembered by analysing the local memories of the event in a small rural  
 45. community. The histories that form the basis of this discussion emerge from  
 46. a broader ethnographic study conducted in the small Andalusian village of  
 47. Arroyomolinos de León,<sup>1</sup> situated in the southern province of Huelva (Sanz  
 48. Sabido forthcoming). Through the use of semi-structured interviews, 22  
 49. villagers recalled the events that took place in their rural community in the  
 50. 1930s and early 1940s, expressing their memories through particular narra-  
 51. tives and performances. Most of these participants had first-hand experience  
 52. of the conflict, while three of them were born during the dictatorship and had

1. Just like other mountainous, agricultural villages, Arroyomolinos has always had a relatively small number of inhabitants. The first modern census, in 1857, included 852 inhabitants, but the locality increased its population thanks to a larger number of births and the arrival of immigrants seeking the opportunities offered by the exploitation of wood and coal. Arroyomolinos began the twentieth century with 2366 inhabitants, increasing to 2666 in 1920 (Jurado Almonte 1995: 168). The municipal register of 1940 included 2357 people who were present in the village, 97 absent inhabitants, and one non-resident or passer-by (Padrón Municipal 1940). The village began to lose inhabitants, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, when a significant number of families left the village to look for better prospects in more prosperous parts of the country. Between 1960 and 1975, the population was reduced to nearly half the size recorded in 1920. After 54 years, the 1994 census counted only 1240 inhabitants. In total, about 490 people contribute actively to the productive economy, mainly through agricultural labour, while the unemployment rate is very high, at approximately 41 per cent of the active population (Jurado Almonte 1995: 168).

2. Predominantly an agrarian village, Arroyomolinos benefitted from its proximity to Minas de Cala (indeed, Arroyomolinos is part of the Mancomunidad 'Sierra Minera', or Community 'Mining Mountains'), an inter-municipal community or association of villages that also includes Cala, Santa Olalla del Cala, Cañaverale de León and Hinojales, all of them villages in the north-eastern part of the province of Huelva (Mancomunidad Intermunicipal de R.S.U. 'Sierra Minera' n.d.). In some ways, working in the mines provided better financial returns than working on the land, and this had some positive effects. However, working conditions in the mines were very poor and workers were exposed to long working hours in a dangerous environment. This was not only the case in Cala, but also in other mines in the province, such as the ones in Minas de Riotinto, just 40 miles to the south. This type of working environment tended to support the growth of syndicalist movements, sharpening class-consciousness and encouraging resistance to economic and political injustice.

also been exposed, from an early age, to the stories that older generations were prepared to share with them. Participants were recruited on a snow-balling basis, aided by my personal background in this locality. Whilst not a resident of Arroyomolinos, my semi-local position (provided by my family links with the locality) generated a number of opportunities: not only were villagers willing to participate (sometimes volunteering when they heard about the project from other residents), but the relative familiarity between the researcher and the participants helped them to speak more freely about a topic of conversation that still produces a certain level of uneasiness and hesitation.

The immediate objective of this analysis is to provide a description of the participants' accounts, while noting the ways in which inhabitants of the community remember the *same* events. The point of this approach is to examine the ways in which the meanings of particular events circulate within public consciousness, with particular reference to a category I refer to as the production of 'local' memories, which assume both individual and collective forms: first, because individuals remember events within the range of their own cognitive abilities; and, second, because individual memories add up to the social memory of the particular community that experienced, witnessed and 'shared' those events. By examining the testimonies of local protagonists, I also delve into the broader discursive frameworks at a national level, which have not only offered explanations for events, but which have mythologized the entire period.

#### 'THERE WAS NO WAR HERE'

The Spanish Civil War has been described as a 'total war', that is, a conflict in which all available resources were mobilized to the extent that individual memory and collective identity 'became synonymous with mass killing and mass dying' (Baumeister and Schüler-Springorum 2008). Despite this categorization, during the course of my ethnographic fieldwork in several localities in Spain, I have met participants whose initial statement was that, in their respective villages, no 'war' as such actually occurred (*aquí no hubo guerra*). Some villagers in Arroyomolinos<sup>2</sup> also uttered this remark. Despite the resistance organized by the Left during the days that followed the news of the military coup on 18 July 1936, it seems that there was no significant struggle once the troops entered the village on 20 August 1936. That there was no 'war', however, does not mean that there was no violence, for the horror of Franco's repression began in the village from that very day. By stating that there was no 'war', participants generally mean that there was barely any real fighting when the villagers came face to face with the troops. The rejection of the term 'war' as an accurate description of the local development of the conflict, is also sometimes explained by the participant's knowledge of the unequal levels of military force that existed *at the national level*, particularly with regards to training and access to weapons. Miguel describes the problem as follows:

The army was divided, and the Civil Guard was divided. If Franco hadn't had the weapons that were sent from Germany, they wouldn't have won the war, I am telling you. The people weren't prepared for war, they didn't know what they were doing. They weren't prepared, but on top of that, they also had to face the Germans.

(2014a, my translation)

1. When I asked Miguel what he meant by his statement that people ‘were not  
2. prepared’, he added that  
3.

4. The *fachas* won because the Germans helped them, but these guys  
5. [the people] were taken by surprise. They made a sergeant out of a  
6. shoemaker, a blacksmith, a musician [...] It can’t be. It can’t work like  
7. that. I think that this was a plot. A plot by everyone. That war ... it was  
8. about manipulation ... by everyone.

9. (2014a, my translation)

10.  
11. In Miguel’s opinion, this was not a balanced struggle. According to García  
12. Márquez (2013), the problem was not only that the anti-fascists were not  
13. given weapons, but also that a campaign was initiated to confiscate the few  
14. that they possessed. Consequently, even though there were plenty of people  
15. who were willing to fight, they found themselves unprotected, in a vulnerable  
16. position and unable to defend themselves (García Márquez 2013: 49).

17. According to Espinosa Maestre, the troops led by Captain Manuel Comín  
18. Allende-Salazar entered the village on 20 August 1936 (2005: 564). None of  
19. my participants could recall the name of the Captain or where the troops  
20. came from, although Santiago (who had not had access to Espinosa Maestre’s  
21. book) remembered that the troops arrived on 20 August. Miguel provides the  
22. following testimony about that summer day in 1936, indicating that there had  
23. actually been some clashes outside the village:  
24.

25. The bridge down there, the bridge [...] someone got his eye busted when  
26. the forces entered the village. When the forces came in, some of the trade  
27. unionists went with the fascists. The trade unions! Listen to what I am  
28. saying [...] and the scum killed people from the village, people who had  
29. not done anything, and they accused them of whatever they wanted. In  
30. Cala, they killed 18 from here. One or two men are buried in La Parrilla,  
31. and one of them was killed because he had been a socialist Mayor. His  
32. children were orphaned. And another one was killed because his brother  
33. was a big fascist and he told the authorities about him.

34. (2014b, my translation)

35.  
36. The moment when ‘the troops entered the village’ is mentioned, in most cases,  
37. as a temporal marker, but details about the event are very scarce. The focus  
38. shifts quickly onto how the fascists began their programme of repression. One  
39. of the executions that all participants have narrated is the one that is often  
40. described as ‘*los 18 de Cala*’/‘Cala’s 18’. At the end of September 1936, eight-  
41. een men were driven to the nearby village of Santa Olalla del Cala, suppos-  
42. edly to make formal statements (Espinosa Maestre 2005: 564). However, the  
43. lorry did not arrive at its assumed destination. Instead, it stopped in Cala,  
44. a village located between Arroyomolinos and Santa Olalla, and all eight-  
45. een men were executed. In total, Franco’s forces arrested between 40 and 60  
46. people between August and the end of 1936 (according to participants), and  
47. there were a number of other incidents that have also remained in the local  
48. memory of the village (see below for further details).

49. Everyone agrees (regardless of their political stance) that the Left did not  
50. kill anyone in Arroyomolinos, neither before nor after the occupation of the  
51. village, although when news arrived that the coup had taken place, twenty  
52. or 30 right-wing people had been imprisoned and both the Church and the

Chapel had been destroyed (Espinosa Maestre 2005: 564). Luis recalls these events:

The fascists were put in the Council. One guy who was doing the military service in Seville, I don't remember his name, went to the Council and poured water under the door. 'There you have water!', he said, only that it wasn't water ... It was petrol. And then those guys were released, and when the whole thing exploded, they went for him and shot him in Seville. I think that's where he is buried.

(2014, my translation)

Similar actions were taken in other villages. For example, García Márquez notes that, in El Castillo de las Guardas, about twenty men – 'the most significant right-wingers in the village' – were arrested for about fourteen days following the news of the coup, with the purpose of preventing them from joining the uprising. Here too there were no reports of executions, beatings or degrading treatment on the part of the local left-wing authorities (García Márquez 2013: 49–50).

Holding the local representatives of fascism in prison, and vandalizing the Church and the Chapel were, in the main, the 'evil actions' that the *rojos* had committed in Arroyomolinos before the Civil War began (for discussions on other actions taken against the Church elsewhere, see Ledesma 2012; Lincoln 1999; Thomas 2014; Vincent 2007). In addition, according to some testimonies, the 'reds' were involved in other acts that, though seemingly inconsequential, served to scare some of the people at the time. For example, Valeria, who comes from a conservative family, reproduces some of the Francoist-sponsored narratives when she recalls the fear that her mother used to express when she knew that one of the most notorious 'reds' walked down her street:

There was a man, '*El Cojo de la Pata Palo*' ['the lame man with the wooden leg'] ... he had a wooden leg. He went into the houses to take the saints and burn them. I don't know if they came in here, but my mum told me many times ... *El Cojo* is coming! And they hid because they were scared of him. He was *rojo, rojo, rojo* ... bad, bad, bad. And they would turn around the pictures of the saints, or take them away to burn them.

(2014, my translation)

Valeria's emphatic description of the *rojos* as 'bad' is indicative of her stance. Coming from a right-wing family, Valeria and her parents were at the receiving end of the actions that some individuals carried out during this period. According to her account, however, the religious images and the Churches were not damaged in Hinojales and Almonte:

When they went into the Church, they threw everything around and they shouted the names of those who helped with the upkeep of the church. When they went into the Church, they threw everything out, and they shouted the names of the people that looked after the church. They also went into the Chapel. Then, later on, everything was repaired. In Hinojales and Almonte they didn't damage their saints, but they were not brave here.

(Valeria 2014 my translation)

The fact is that the Republican Mayor in Hinojales, Pedro Uceda, managed to circumvent the development of local clashes by encouraging villagers not to

1. resolve their personal or political quarrels by accusing others. Consequently,  
 2. not only did they avoid the destruction of the saints' images, but there was  
 3. also no bloodshed.

4. However, Valeria's words regarding Almonte require a deeper review of the  
 5. facts. Espinosa Maestre (2012), in a thorough study of the *sucesos*/incidents of  
 6. Almonte in 1932, describes how a number of clashes developed after the local  
 7. Republican government decided to remove some tiling that depicted religious  
 8. images (Virgen del Rocío and Sagrado Corazón de Jesús). This decision was  
 9. in keeping with the Second Republic's definition of Spain as a secular coun-  
 10. try. Yet, this was not accepted by the Right, which used it as an opportunity  
 11. to challenge the Republic on the matter of the Agrarian Reform (see below).  
 12. The national plan to reform the ways in which lands are distributed took on  
 13. a particular meaning in Almonte, a village that sits in the National Park of  
 14. Doñana. These lands had been available to all until the nineteenth century,  
 15. when most of its lands were privatized. The local council, sharing the same  
 16. principles espoused by the national government, aimed to return those lands  
 17. to the people, so all villagers could benefit from them for basic subsistence.  
 18. Espinosa Maestre (2012) argues that the *sucesos* of 1932 in Almonte were only  
 19. the prelude to what was to come. After the 1936 coup, more than 100 people  
 20. were extrajudicially executed.

21. Not only are Valeria's remarks mistaken with regards to the ways in which  
 22. events developed in other villages, but her perspective focuses almost entirely  
 23. on the protection of the saints, rather than the safety and welfare of actual  
 24. people. Her view therefore contrasts with Miguel's viewpoint: while Valeria  
 25. values the fact that the images had been protected in other localities, Miguel  
 26. emphasizes the fact that executions had taken place in those villages *regardless*  
 27. of the reds' behaviour:

28.  
 29. The people they executed, they killed them because they just wanted to  
 30. do it. I don't think the stuff with the saints was really a reason for doing  
 31. it. Burning the saints was not a catastrophe. Maybe it was wrong, but it  
 32. was not a reason. It was just an excuse. They wanted to kill people and  
 33. that was it.

34. (2014a, my translation)

35.  
 36. During another interview, Miguel referred to the group of local *beatas* (exces-  
 37. sively devout or overpious women) and, in a similar vein, stated that

38.  
 39. These women, whatever they tell you, I don't know ... I don't believe  
 40. any of it. 'My father, my father' [...] What about your father? Your father  
 41. stayed here and the others were the ones who died. Here there are very  
 42. bad people [...] here, in this village.

43. (2014b, my translation)

44.  
 45. These testimonies, which illustrate the local development of the Civil War  
 46. within the boundaries of Arroyomolinos, indicate the way in which the  
 47. confrontation amongst different agents played out in this particular village,  
 48. both before and after the coup.

## 50. CLASS AND LAND OWNERSHIP

51. Rural workers in Andalusia have historically had a strong sense of 'class  
 52. consciousness', which was particularly important in the context of the Second



Republic and its agrarian reforms, but which had been apparent from the nineteenth century onwards, with the development of anarchist and revolutionary perspectives. Indeed, class consciousness emerged in the nineteenth century 'in response to the abolition of agrarian collectivism and the introduction of laissez-faire capitalism' (Gilmore 1977: 149). Society was divided into a landowning class and a landless proletarian class: in rural Andalusia, the unequal distribution of lands (see Malefakis 1971) meant that about half the population were landless farm workers (*jornaleros*, or day labourers) who earned their day-wages (*el jornal*) by working in large estates owned by the landed gentry.

Before and after the war, there were three main farm estates in or around the village: Los Murtales, La Vicaría and El Castaño. Many villagers found work and a place to live on these three farms. According to Rafael, there were so many people working in El Castaño that the hairdresser had to spend 'one entire week in the farm in order to cut everyone's hair before coming back to the village' (2015, my translation). Meanwhile, La Vicaría has also employed, for many years, a significant number of people, to the extent that entire families (coming from Arroyomolinos, Cala and Calera, amongst other nearby villages) lived permanently on its vast lands. These days, the farm has progressively reduced its number of employees, until it has practically ceased to operate.

Oral testimonies shed light on the class divisions that existed amongst different families in the village, and how the power and position of the upper classes were linked to their ownership of lands and related businesses. The issue of land ownership is, in fact, integral to understanding the class struggles that characterized 1930s Spain. These struggles materialized in Arroyomolinos in a number of incidents, some of which took place in the larger farm estates mentioned above. For instance, during the *sucesos* of the village in 1932 (a workers' strike that took place in a local building site), some armed clashes developed in El Castaño, where a goatherd broke his arm (Santiago 2013). Some civil guards were also injured during the clashes (Anon. 1932; Elena 2013; Juan 2014). Carlos explains how his grandfather, who sympathized with right-wing parties, assisted one of the guards when a group of strikers came to finish him off:

My grandfather was right-wing. He had a plot of land, near the road to Cañaverál. That's where the workers were building the road from Arroyo to Cañaverál. It was made of stone and, well, that's when the revolution started, the revolution of the peasants, the workers. So, there were pickets. Some of the workers wanted to work, and other people didn't let them work, the usual thing in picket lines. Then, they caught a couple of civil guards, they beat them up [...] and they were half dead. My grandfather took them to his land, where he had a small house, in the countryside. My grandmother had a sheet, a used sheet, an old one, and used it to wrap their heads. The workers knew they couldn't have gone far, because they were hurt, and they came to my grandfather's place to finish them off. My grandfather was very nice. He said to them: 'the one who has the balls to do it, come inside'.

(2014, my translation)

In narratives such as this one, we observe the class and ideological differences that existed amongst villagers. Further details emerge in this regard



3. Despite the significance of certain outputs, such as Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* (1995), and George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), other media representations and cultural works, such as those typically seen on television, tend to simplify the complexity of the ideological stances. These also tend to be overlooked or glossed over in school textbooks.

the collective imaginary in contemporary Spain,<sup>3</sup> as though the conflict consisted of two 'sides' only: the Republican Left and the Nationalist Right. The frequent reference to the 'two Spains' is a clear indication of this generalization, which still permeates Spain's collective memory. Nevertheless, the true complexity of these ideological divisions (from 'neutral' positions to clearly defined perspectives, including anarchist, communist, libertarian communist, socialist and fascist, to name the most significant) determined the course of the war and, ultimately, its long-lasting consequences. Santiago explains, succinctly, his understanding of the ways in which these ideologies clashed:

The republican side was divided, because the anarchists didn't want the republic, and the government was scared of the people, so they didn't give them weapons for the revolution. And the other countries [...] the Germans helped the nationalists, but the capitalist countries were scared of communists and anarchists. Franco seemed a better choice for them.  
(2013, my translation)

The lack of weapons emerges, once again, in Santiago's testimony, indicating that, for him, this was the fundamental difference that underpinned the ideas over which different factions were fighting. Considering both national and international aspects of the war, he seems to conclude that the anti-fascists were not given weapons to fight because it did not serve anybody's interests: everyone (the government, the capitalist countries) was 'scared' of what the social mass might achieve if they acquired the resources that they needed to fight.

In another interview, Miguel made a similar point, although he approached it from a different perspective. He reflected on the connections between people's ideologies, their socio-economic status, and their behaviour towards other individuals. Miguel, clearly speaking from a libertarian perspective (even though he does not adhere to a particular political stance), often echoed the principles of the CNT in his opinions about collectivization, solidarity and freedom from any systemic forms of control. Not only does he abhor fascist repression, but also believes that the actions of communist leaders were equally reprehensible:

What they want is to strike terror into the people. Everything was turned upside down, but the ringleaders got away [...] La Pasionaria, Carrillo, all those people [...] they all went away, while they made a sergeant out of any shoemaker or carpenter. When fascist professional officers arrived, knowing what they were doing, what chance could the shoemaker have of surviving [...] of defending anything? The people paid for the war... the nobodies, the poor wretches.  
(Miguel 2014a, my translation)

Santiago's and Miguel's arguments that people were not prepared for war (due to the lack of weapons and professional training) appear amalgamated, more or less explicitly, with moral judgements about the (lack of) involvement on the part of external governments and national politicians (for a discussion on the non-intervention pact and the support received by Republicans and fascists, see, e.g., Beevor 2006: 147–58; Bolloten 2015: 97–109; Moradiellos 1999).

1. The analysis of these testimonies also sheds light on a fundamental differ-  
 2. ence between the ways in which culprits are identified within the narratives.  
 3. While participants, such as Miguel, do not hesitate to allude to individuals  
 4. such as Dolores Ibárruri 'La Pasionaria' and Santiago Carrillo – both of whom  
 5. are widely known at a national (rather than local) level – they refuse persist-  
 6. ently to reveal the names of villagers who are known to have taken an active  
 7. part in the violent acts that developed locally. The national level provides them  
 8. with sufficient distance from the local sphere so as not to raise any concerns  
 9. within the village itself. Indeed, only four participants made direct allusions to  
 10. the individuals who executed the victims, but they all refused to identify them  
 11. by name. When discussing the matter with Miguel, he referred to them as 'the  
 12. volunteers' and, when I asked him who they were, he replied:

13.  
 14. I don't know who they were, and if I knew, I wouldn't tell you anyway.  
 15. But there were people who volunteered to shoot, their children are  
 16. still around, some people still know who they were. They went to kill  
 17. people, and then they came back singing, celebrating, as if they had  
 18. done something good, or funny.

19. (2014b, my translation)

20.  
 21. Later in the conversation, Miguel confirmed that he knew who some of the  
 22. volunteers were, but he did not want to reveal their names: 'it's better to leave  
 23. things the way they are. What's the point of going back to that?' He had also  
 24. refused to tell me who shot the civil guard during the *sucesos*, so his unwilling-  
 25. ness to provide names is not motivated by an intention to protect the Right  
 26. or the Left but, simply, to protect people and avoid what he considers to be a  
 27. potential problem: 'what can you do about it now, most of these people are  
 28. now dead anyway, it's better to leave things the way they are, don't get into  
 29. it'. Valentina also made an allusion to the executioners:

30.  
 31. We know who they were, we all know. But, girl, what's the point of  
 32. saying their names? They are all dead now, they are not here to respond,  
 33. only their children and grandchildren. It wasn't their fault, the youngest  
 34. may not even know about it. What's the point of stirring it up?

35. (2014, my translation)

36.  
 37. Valeria, however, makes a different type of reference to the men who partici-  
 38. pated in the executions. She points out that her own father was asked to take  
 39. part in one of them:

40.  
 41. My father was right-wing. Bienve's father was very young, his chil-  
 42. dren were very little, and they took him near Cala, I don't know where  
 43. exactly, but it was near Cala, and they killed him. They shot him dead.  
 44. My father said he had a horrible time, because he had to keep quiet  
 45. and witness how they killed him. He couldn't take part in it ... he just  
 46. couldn't do it. It was horrible. [...] My mum told me these things, and  
 47. at least they never asked my father to go anywhere else, because it was  
 48. horrific.

49. (Valeria 2014, my translation)

50.  
 51. It remains unclear why exactly he was asked to attend this execution, but  
 52. another participant has described Valeria's father as 'a good man. Right-wing,

yes, but he was a decent person and never killed anyone' (Miguel 2014b, my translation). As he had previously argued, behaviour and moral standing are not necessarily determined by ideology.

### **'LOS AÑOS MALOS': THE BAD YEARS**

Despite the importance of the ideological underpinning of the Spanish Civil War, one of the key themes that stand out from the testimonies is the daily struggle that the average citizen had to endure in order to meet their basic needs and those of their families. Here, participants do not seem to be making reference to any of the ideological issues that underpinned the war, even though their efforts to survive were meant to be at the heart of the very socio-economic struggles that led to the coup. Many recollections, therefore, focus purely on the day-to-day experience of hunger and extreme necessity. In this respect, their narrations draw our attention to a crucial aspect of the history of the 1930s and the postwar years: that of the average citizen whose struggle was to survive from one day to the next (del Arco Blanco 2007). For them, the ideological and class battles were not formulated in abstract or theoretical terms, but materialized in real problems that they had to face on a daily basis. For instance, Manuel, who was born in 1940, describes what he remembers about his childhood as follows:

I was born in 1940, during the bad years. There was much scarcity of everything. When I came to understand what was happening I was seven or eight years old. I didn't notice before, but things were hard. There was no bread because there was no wheat. There was no bread, no meat, nothing. We only had lice, because there was no health service, or social security, nothing. Lice, bed bugs [...] There was also tuberculosis, because people didn't eat, and they died and that was it.

(2015, my translation)

Manuel's reference to the 'bad years' is not uncommon. Fran's (2015) first description of this period is that 'there wasn't anything to eat. We had nothing. We worked a lot but we were hungry'. '*Los años malos*'/'the bad years' or '*los años del hambre*'/'the hunger years' are typical descriptions of the 1940s, when economic insecurity, scarcity and empty stomachs were the greatest social problems, together with the subsequent health issues and dreadful sanitary conditions. When Costa y Martínez calculated, in 1912, how much money was necessary for the average Andalusian peasant family (*familia jornalera*) to meet the costs of food, rent and other living expenses, he concluded that there was an overall deficit between income and outcome, although the severity of the situation varied across different Spanish regions. Costa y Martínez noted that

Peasants need, on each of the 365 days of the year, three pesetas, and only earns from one to one and a half pesetas; therefore, the state of things has to change: a change through which peasants should earn, every day, from six to eight *reales* in excess of what they earn now.

(1912: 63, my translation)

Similar descriptions of scarcity abound in the literature (del Arco Blanco 2007; Rodríguez Barreira 2011, 2013) and in other oral testimonies, in which hunger

1. is a recurrent theme. Santiago, for instance, recalls how he and his father,  
2. taken as one economic unit, did not earn enough money per day to buy bread  
3. for their household.

4. When asked whether anyone died during the period, Manuel adds further  
5. details about the lack of resources that villagers had to endure:

6.  
7. People didn't have anything. What happened was very bad. Here in  
8. the village many people died during the war and also later. There was  
9. no work, but who could possibly go to work anyway, when there were  
10. no people to take food home. In the war many women were widowed  
11. because their men died in the war, or were killed here, or they were  
12. taken to prison. They took some of them to the cemetery wall and they  
13. killed them there.

14. (2015, my translation)

15.  
16. Manuel's statement regarding the lack of men to work the lands and provide  
17. a means of sustenance for their families is also observed by Sánchez Jiménez,  
18. who points out that the lack of men and the lack of wheat were two simulta-  
19. neous socio-economic problems that were closely interrelated:

20.  
21. Lack of wheat, economically speaking, becomes more noticeable,  
22. because nothing could be done about the human losses. The population  
23. then begins to grow again despite the deficit, the speculation, the lack  
24. of transparency and all the determining factors that took root during  
25. the war.

26. (1975: 124, my translation)

27.  
28. In reiterating the negativity of the situation, Manuel emphasized the practical  
29. elements of the struggle to survive. The lack of food and the fact that many  
30. people had died are amalgamated in his memory. It is striking, however, that  
31. in Manuel's mind, hunger and death do not appear as elements of a cause-  
32. effect relationship (people literally 'dying of starvation'), but that both seem  
33. to appear as direct consequences of the war. In my approaching this respond-  
34. ent, I had purposely avoided any references to the armed conflict: after asking  
35. Manuel when he was born, I followed with a general question about his child-  
36. hood memories. As Bjerg and Rasmussen (2012) noted in their study of school  
37. memories, the use of different prompting techniques makes a difference to  
38. the narrative framework that participants use to present their memories. In  
39. this case, it was Manuel, rather than the interviewer, who mentioned the war,  
40. which suggests that his understanding of his childhood was marked by the  
41. conflict, even though it had officially ended by the time he was born.

#### 42. **REPRESSION IN THE VILLAGE: MOTIVES AND JUSTIFICATIONS**

43.  
44.  
45. A significant proportion of the testimonies often focus on the description of  
46. what happened to the participants, their relatives or other fellow villagers. The  
47. Critical Ethnography of Memory, in line with its aim of uncovering 'unknown'  
48. stories and struggles, pays attention to oral testimonies that shed light on  
49. the repressive practices that were conducted and the consequences that  
50. such measures had on people's lives. The actions that, directly or indirectly,  
51. were taken to punish citizens in this repressive environment were particu-  
52. larly tough on women. Besides the various physical and psychological forms

4. See Abad (2008, 2013) for a discussion of prisoners' wives as silenced protagonists and their role in the pro-amnesty campaign.
5. When political prisoners were released, they were often banished from their villages for an additional period of time (Gómez Bravo 2009). This was an additional method to continue marginalizing the enemies of the regime after the end of their sentence.

of abuse that they endured, they also suffered the consequences of losing the male figures in their families (husbands, sons, fathers, brothers or uncles). Not only did they have to deal with the emotional consequences of their men's forced disappearance, execution or imprisonment,<sup>4</sup> but the absence of men in the family also led to social and economic exclusion, in a context where men were in charge of providing sustenance and protection. Not only were women expected to meet the moral-Catholic standards imposed by Franco (García del Cid 2012; Nash 2006), but economic forms of repression put them in particularly vulnerable positions – especially when they were under pressure to feed their children.

Santiago's mother, Magdalena, was one of the women who endured the repressive practices in Arroyomolinos, and one of the many thousands who suffered the effects of Francoist persecution across Spain. She is still remembered locally as someone who was both very literate and strongly political. Her son explained that she was a Libertarian Communist, and was always up to date with the latest political developments in Spain and abroad, which she read about in magazines such as *Tierra y Libertad*'/Land and freedom', which could be found at the local CNT centre. Her strong ideological stance and involvement in political debates are still recalled in the village, a memory that is reinforced by the fact that her son is also known for being equally outspoken regarding political matters. According to the oral testimonies, she is, in fact, the individual who is most often recalled when the issue of repression against women is discussed.

Santiago recalls how his mother was sentenced to death alongside other women in the village:

She was sentenced to death because she had left-wing ideas. My mother had a grave ready for twelve days, in total there were seven or eight women who had been sentenced to death and all their graves were ready. Some people said that women shouldn't be executed because they had children. In the end they decided not to kill them for that reason.

(2013, my translation)

Other participants also remember that she had been in prison, where the guards had shaved her head, and had been sentenced to death. Particularly when it concerns women, participants tend to connect the memory of their imprisonment with the fact that their heads had been shaved, a technique that was used frequently to shame the victims publicly (González Duro 2012). Valeria (2014), for example, recalls that 'some women were taken to prison and they were shaven, because they were also *rojas*. But I don't know who they are'. According to Santiago (2013), up to 100 women suffered this indignity at different points during the period.

However, being imprisoned and living through the threat of execution did not make up the sum total of Magdalena's experiences of repression. In 1937, Santiago's parents were both banished to La Corte, a small village near Aracena, where his father (a socialist) came from.<sup>5</sup> Initially, Santiago accompanied them, although he would soon return to Arroyomolinos to work with his grandfather in the countryside at a young age, having barely attended school. Magdalena's brother, Aurelio (the local Secretary of the Libertarian Youth) managed to run away when he was being taken to the cemetery in Arroyomolinos to be executed, alongside two other men. He spent the

1. following three years in hiding, until he turned himself in after the war had  
 2. ended. Aurelio was banished to a village in Córdoba for a few years before he  
 3. could return to Arroyomolinos.

4. One of Santiago's first memories of his mother is a conversation that  
 5. took place between her and several villagers at the local bakery. He often  
 6. recalls how, at some point before the elections of February 1936, the baker,  
 7. Juan 'el Cuezó', a socialist who would eventually become Mayor – and then  
 8. executed in the summer of 1936 – had questioned her libertarian stance on  
 9. the issue of voting. The fact that CNT members had refused to participate in  
 10. previous elections had facilitated the recurrent victories of the Right:

11.  
 12. My mum and I went to buy some bread, I always remember this day,  
 13. because there was a huge debate down there at the baker's. The baker  
 14. believed in socialism and he said to my mum, 'Don't you see, Magdalena,  
 15. don't you realize that because of your refusal to vote the Right keeps  
 16. winning?' Of course, libertarians didn't want to get involved in politics,  
 17. so he said 'if you don't vote, it's the same as giving the vote to the Right,  
 18. don't you realize? You need to wake up'. It was a huge debate because  
 19. they couldn't agree.

20. (Santiago 2013, my translation)

21.  
 22. After the coup, even though she was one of the most outspoken women at the  
 23. time, Magdalena was not the only woman in the village who was targeted by  
 24. the forces of reaction. Other women were also subjected to various forms of  
 25. humiliation, although none of the participants mentioned that they had been  
 26. banished. Nonetheless, they all remember the fact that a group of women –  
 27. including Magdalena – had been sentenced to death, indicating that there  
 28. were 'seven or eight' who were going to be executed. Nobody was sure of the  
 29. complete list of the condemned, but some of them recall how their graves  
 30. were dug in Alcántara's land, a local olive grove, in the days prior to the date  
 31. set for the executions. Only one interviewee, Miguel, ventured to provide  
 32. what appears to be the most complete list that I have been able to identify at  
 33. this stage, 80 years after the events, although it is far from accurate and it has  
 34. not been possible to verify the information:

35.  
 36. Seven or eight women were sentenced to death. One of my aunties,  
 37. María, was one of them. They wanted to kill her because she had taken  
 38. something from the church, something that had been thrown away, out  
 39. there. You can't imagine the chaos around the saints [...] I don't know.  
 40. And Elvira, rest in peace, she lived over there [...]. Cupida's mother,  
 41. three. Santiago's mother, four. María 'Moya', who I appreciated a lot,  
 42. five. There were seven or eight. They shaved them. They shaved them  
 43. and everything. And I think that X's mother,<sup>6</sup> too ... I think she was  
 44. another one, I'm not sure.

45. (2014a, my translation)

46.  
 47. In the end, these women were acquitted following a local 'debate' of sorts,  
 48. amongst the principals in the village, about the fate of these women's chil-  
 49. dren, who would be orphaned if their mothers were killed. Eventually, the  
 50. decision was made not to execute them.

51. Some of these women were more politically outspoken than others and,  
 52. in some cases, they were only targeted because they could read, or because

6. I have edited out the name of the last woman because not only was Miguel unsure about it, but he also mentioned that, if this is accurate, her son may not even be aware of this fact.



they were related to politically active men. These times of revolt also gave some individuals the opportunity to take revenge, settle existing quarrels or take advantage of some situations for their own gain. According to Miguel, for example, a man was killed in Segura de León because he had an outstanding debt with another villager. During the interview with Luis, he described the story of a man who, having already been in prison and released, was told by one of the guards to go back 'just to check in'. However, suspecting that they would not let him go again, he prepared his escape:

Postre's father ended up in Madrid. He fled the village. They thought he was stupid. They called him, with the intention of putting him in prison, but he must have sniffed it out. He told them he would come but he needed to find some figs for his family, because they were hungry, and then he escaped.

(Luis 2014, my translation)

When asked why they wanted to imprison this victim, Luis replied that there was no political reason for it: 'anyone could accuse you of anything'. The randomness implied in this statement emerges in nearly all conversations about the past in more or less explicit ways. In some cases, this observation appears within wider accounts that are critical of the political, economic and social setting, as is the case with the testimony offered by Luis, whose left-wing political stance and critical vision emerge consistently throughout his narrative.

For other participants, however, emphasizing the randomness of the accusations and executions seems to serve a twofold function: first, the narrator can avoid a deeper engagement with the issues at stake and, second, he or she can steer clear of doing so in public, in front of fellow villagers. This type of response serves, therefore, as an avoidance mechanism that narrators incorporate into their testimonies in order to circumvent what they perceive to be a potentially awkward or dangerous situation. The desire to avoid 'problems' also underpins the instruction that parents and grandparents who, having lived through the dictatorship, have passed on to their children (many of whom have already become parents themselves): '*no te señales*' or '*no hay que significarse*' – that is, that they should not 'stand out' or 'take sides', 'should things get ugly' ('*por si las cosas se pongan feas*'). So, for example, Mateo, who consistently avoided making any explicitly political remarks during our conversation, explained the executions as follows:

Here people were killed for the sake of being killed. Nothing had been done. They weren't bad people. They hadn't done anything. People pointed at one another over the slightest little thing.

(2015, my translation)

Mateo's initial utterance – 'here people were killed for the sake of being killed' – is striking due to its grammatical construction. The use of the passive voice to express this idea contrasts with the more frequent 'they killed for the sake of killing', or other statements articulated in the active voice that would emphasize, rather than erase, the agency of the killers, even if their names are not revealed (*they* killed). For Mateo, alluding to the randomness of the acts provides him with a way to avoid having to examine them in further depth.

## 1. FINAL REMARKS

2. After 80 years of military coup that led to the Spanish Civil War, Spain is  
 3. still immersed in a cycle of recrimination, one that exists within various  
 4. layers of denial, including those represented by private, local and national  
 5. spheres. In his essays on Holocaust denial, Vidal-Naquet (1994) presents  
 6. a critique of the 'assassins of memory', whose attempts to deny certain  
 7. aspects of the past not only have direct consequences for the victims, but  
 8. also produce a second period of aggression, when the causes and the reality  
 9. of their suffering are doubted, de-contextualized and falsified. Against this  
 10. 'mnemonicide' or assassination of memory (Morris 2007), the local memo-  
 11. ries unearthed by a Critical Ethnography of Memory provide important  
 12. social-pedagogic tools to counteract any politically motivated distortions of  
 13. the past.<sup>7</sup>

14. The themes that have emerged in this study are not exclusive to  
 15. Arroyomolinos de León, nor do they encompass all the repressive practices  
 16. that occurred across the country. For instance, the custom of 'walking' neigh-  
 17. bours through local streets was a generalized tool of repression that served  
 18. a dual purpose: to punish targeted individuals by humiliating them publicly,  
 19. and to control the direct and indirect witnesses of these acts by generating  
 20. fear in the minds of bystanders. Other tools of repression, such as murder  
 21. and rape, were also widespread, although, as we have seen, there were local  
 22. variations in their implementation and in the ways in which decisions were  
 23. made within each village. In Arroyomolinos, we find a clear example of this  
 24. in the determination not to kill any women, which was entirely the result  
 25. of local judgement. This does not mean, however, that women were exempt  
 26. from other forms of repression.

27. In sum, despite the commonalities that can be found between localities  
 28. across the country, the Civil War was far from a monolithic event that can be  
 29. described with a few select or 'totalizing' statements. Conducting a Critical  
 30. Ethnographies of Memory across the country would therefore help us to  
 31. take account of the myriad histories of which the past is actually composed,  
 32. and would develop a more in-depth understanding based on a multiplicity  
 33. of localized analyses. In turn, this approach would provide rich evidence to  
 34. counteract reductive and oversimplifying accounts of the conflict.

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7. Denial, however, is not performed only by agents who have an interest in concealing their responsibility in the repression of others but, as argued by del Río, doubt and scepticism towards the victims' testimonies and the entire historical period 'constitute an indignity that makes us accomplices of the murderers' (2014: 197, my translation).

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